

# A taxonomy of trust in education: With a lens to magnify the limitations of hierarchical foundations of trust, and a key to solve the puzzle of children's trust in teaching

Global Studies of Childhood

1–13

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DOI: 10.1177/20436106251398511

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## Abstract

This article discusses a taxonomy of trust in education, against the challenge of a paradoxical relationship between inclusiveness and selectivity of the education system. From the 17th century, the cultural form of “childhood” has appeared in European modernity and its global ramifications. No other social system has been more fascinated by the child’s journey into adulthood than education. The first part of the article discusses the social construction of the pupil as educational persona replacing the child as the reference for curricula based on the intersection between standardised stages of development, standardised contents and standardised teaching techniques. The article continues proposing a reflection on the implications of the invention of the pupil for children’s trusting commitments in education, arguing that a hierarchical positioning between teachers and pupil based in unequal epistemic status supports types of trust, trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities that are conducive of pupils and teachers’ trust, but fail to support children’s trusting commitments, because the hierarchical positioning between teachers and pupil is component of a semantic of education centred on role performances, rather than expectations of personal contributions. Developing Giddens and Luhmann’s sociological work on trust, the article introduces of a third type of trust, personal trust. The viability of personal trust in education is discussed in the context of the ongoing transformation of the intergenerational order towards the recognition of children’s self-determination as a resource, rather than a risk, for education. As educationalists from a wide range of disciplines are challenging top-down models of transmission of knowledge, a position of children as authors of valid knowledge in the education system allows trust-building processes that are relational and based on the promotion

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of active citizenship, reducing the risk of alienation intrinsic to trust based on expertise and trust based categorical inequalities.

### **Keywords**

trust, self-determination right, epistemic rights, intergenerational relationships

## **How is education possible? The socio-cultural process of *pupilisation***

The cultural form of “childhood” appeared in European modernity, and its global ramifications, in the 17th century (Ariés, 1962; Cunningham, 2005). Over the last three centuries, with an acceleration imposed by the romantic culture, practices and discourses thematising childhood have been converging and diverging within and across social systems such as art, family, law, health, politics, economics and science. This process has generated a multidimensional and often contradictory semantics of childhood (Baraldi, 2023; Farini and Scollan, 2024; Seele, 2012).

This article introduces a taxonomy of trust in education. It is essential to emphasise that the empirical objects of our discussion, the types of trust in education, are cultural forms underpinned by the social representations of children and childhood developed within European modernity. A reference to European modernity is methodologically pivotal: the uneasy relationship between the inclusivity of a universal ambition (socialisation of all children) on the one hand, and the selective outcome of the educational practices aimed to secure it on the other hand, concerns the education system evolved in European modernity.

While the prevailing understanding of education may be decisively influenced by cultural forms produced in the evolution of western society (Mangez and Vanden Broeck, 2021), it would be a methodological and ethical weakness of this article if diverse cultural perspectives on childhood and education was not acknowledged. Although the discussion of non-European semantics of childhood, education and generational order falls outside the scope of this article, a review of recent literature highlights, among others, the collection of essays edited by Percy-Smith et al. (2023), the special themed issue coordinated by Phillips and Ritchie (2025) and the work of Bertoli and colleagues (Bertoli et al, 2024) as examples of sociological research with children in regions where European cultural perspectives do not hegemonise discourses about, with and from children.

The magmatic intersection between the multidimensional semantics of childhood and on generational order of European modernity has generated a panoply of portraits of the child. Across places and throughout time, children have been painted in the colours of a range of ideas and beliefs concerning their position in society, their capabilities, the value of their agency, the viability of their self-determination. Several social systems have constructed social representations children and childhood; nevertheless, no other social system is more fascinated by children than education. With the gradual development of mass schooling, education has claimed the position of “the social system of childhood” (Luhmann and Schorr, 1982), juxtaposed to, and often competing with, the family.

Nevertheless, this object of educational fascination, the child, has stubbornly remained out of education’s reach. The child, the individual consciousness interacting with the social world, proves, to be reticent to educational planning and practices, with remarkable consistency. The child escapes standardised expectations, the child develops in ways that education cannot control, or even measure, because the child’s consciousness remains untransparent to the education system (Vanderstraeten, 2004).

Already in the first phase of mass schooling, the triangulation between the curriculum, the teacher and the child that characterises modern pedagogy (Vanderstraeten, 2006) revealed an intrinsic instability, due to the resistance opposed by the human elements of the triangle, the teacher and the child, against rational planning with universal ambitions. Regarding the teacher, the development of material references (teacher's education), social references (professional standards) and temporal references (career progression) references allowed the stabilisation of standardised role expectations already from the 19th century (Vanderstraeten, 2006). Regarding the child, stabilisation was pursued with the invention of an educational surrogate: the pupil.

Thus, an intrinsic limitation of educational communication, the impossibility of controlling children's consciousnesses, does not paralyse the operations of the education system, which has responded to the unattainability of the child with the construction of a replacement for educational use: the pupil. The pupil is a social construct internal to the education system, a genuine product of education. The pupil is the educational reconstruction of the child within the education system, built by education system, as much, for example, as the patient is the medical reconstruction of the person within the healthcare system. The pupil, not the child, is the reference for educational communication; the pupil, not the child, can be measured against standardised expectations. Only the pupil can be the reference for curricula that combine standardised stages of development, standardised contents and standardised teaching techniques.

The pupil is a social representation, constructed within the educational discourse, for educational purposes. This constructivist argument, however, presents only half of the picture: the pupil is a social representation that becomes embodied in the child. The pupil is objectified (Moscovici, 1988) in the body of the child that serves as a figurative nucleus (Wagner et al., 1999), making the pupil becomes observable, tangible, concrete, communicable.

Programming the transition of children into adulthood utilising universalistic developmental logics is an impossible task that, within the educational system, becomes viable, because in the pedagogical discourse the idea (the pupil) colonises the symbol (the child), in a socio-cultural process that can be defined "*pupilisation*".

For many decades after the introduction of mass schooling, pedagogy relied on a high degree of certainty regarding the relationship between the object of educational communication (the pupilised child), and the function of education (the planned socialisation of the pupilised child). In the era of mass schooling, education promptly claimed exclusive control over the task of securing the successful development of the *pupilised* child into adulthood.

## **Pupilisation as the condition and the limit of education. The chiasm between education of the pupil and socialisation of the child**

Notwithstanding optimistic premises, education has struggled to fulfil the ambitious self-description of a system that can secure a rational and planned socialisation of all children. This was evident already in the central decades of the 20th century. By the early 1960s, the discourses in, and on, education had recognised that an unquenchable appetite for organisational and pedagogical reforms had become the main form of education self-description (Baraldi and Corsi, 2017) because of a structural limit of education: the impossibility to control the development of children (Arendt, 1993). Of course, such limit is not exclusive of education: even the strongest volition cannot control others' understanding of communication, and the reactions to it (Vanderstraeten, 2004). This is a constructionist argument, but it is also close to what any educational practitioner experiences: neither the most advanced pedagogical means, nor the most severe disciplinary regime or the combination of both can secure

that educators' actions will produce their intended consequences (Vanderstraeten, 2004). Unintended consequences are the unavoidable companion to any educational intention (Farini and Scollan, 2023). Education is particularly exposed to unintended consequences. The ambitious task of producing and preserving social cohesion through the systemic socialisation of all children is coupled with the impossibility to control the socialisation of children.

The interaction between individual consciousness and its social environment may, or may not, provoke the structural changes in the "inner sphere" of the individual as intended by educational communication (Vanderstraeten, 2000). In fact, when the educational intention of communication is revealed, the individual who is expected to be educated acquires the freedom to travel some distance (Luhmann, 1995), to accept the educational intention for mere opportunism, or to avoid "being educated" as much as possible (Vanderstraeten, 2006). Notwithstanding the optimistic nature of education's self-description, the array of unintended consequences of any educational action is known to educational practitioners. Pedagogical theories have experienced difficulties in reducing the unintended consequences of educational intentions. This has been largely acknowledged by pedagogical research since the last third of the 20th century, embracing the concept of unintended consequences as analytical tool, for instance underpinning research on the "hidden curricula" (Kendall, 1998). The realism of the pedagogical models based on the transmission of knowledge from the adult to the child has been questioned regarding all stages of education (Farini and Scollan, 2023; Siraj-Blatchford, 2008).

The reference of educational communication is the pupil, which is a social construct of the education system. Because the pupil is a social construct, a *persona ficta*, it is possible to link standardised learning expectations to stages of development. The distance between the empirical pupil (the pupilised child) and the expected stage of development can be utilised to measure the effect of education therefore to evaluate the need for reform, either the reform of educational practices, or the reform of the pupil. Whilst the *socialisation of the child* requires the possibility for the child of reading the behaviour of others, recognising social expectations (Vanderstraeten, 2000), the *education of the pupil* aims to generate standardised learning patterns that presuppose the coordination of a plurality of efforts. However, the pupil is a *persona* created by education itself, that lives only inside the education system. Differently from the level of development of the pupil, the consciousness of the child to be socialised remains untransparent, and so are the child's understanding of the contents and motivations of educational communication. In fact, educational communication doubles the motives for rejection, because it can be rejected not only if the contents are unsatisfactory, but also if the educational intention is considered unacceptable (Vanderstraeten and Biesta, 2006).

Nevertheless, education "happens" notwithstanding its improbability. A question is therefore pressing: what are the social conditions of children's participation in the education system? The question is particularly intriguing, because it invites attention to the position of children in the education system, a crucial context of their social experience. A possible answer to the question introduces a medium of communication specialised in creating the conditions for the acceptance of communication. This medium is *trust* (Luhmann, 1988). The following sections of the article will argue that the social conditions that make education possible, as well as the type of trust that supports participation in education dramatically change in the passage from the pupilised child to the child. The first part of the argument introduces trust as a medium of educational communication.

## **Abandoning familiar places, conquering new territories: The essential role of trust**

As all media of communication, for instance money in the economic system or truth in the scientific system (Luhmann, 1995), trust supports acceptance of communication (Luhmann, 1988).

Most media of communication operate exclusively within the semantic boundaries of a specific social system. For example, money is a medium of communication that supports the acceptance of communication only within the semantics of the economic system (prices, the value of labour, the transfer of ownership). It is an old, on the other hand, well-known trope, that “money cannot buy love”. In the same vein, money cannot secure the validity of a scientific theory. Differently from money, and from all other media of communication, trust is not system-specific. The scope of trust is at once broader and narrower than the scope of system-specific media of communication. The scope of trust is *broader* because trust supports the acceptance of communication across all social systems. Trust mediates communication in the social system of science as much as in the social system of art or the social system of education, or in any other social system. The scope of trust is *narrower*, because trust specialises in supporting engagement in communication only when the outcomes of decision-making, starting from the acceptance of communication, are most uncertain (Coleman, 2017). Like hope and faith, trust can support risky decision-making outside the familiar worlds of ordinary experiences (Kwong, 2019). Milona (2019) convincingly argues that trust is composed of a desire and a belief that the expected outcomes of decision-making are attainable, proposing the theoretical argument that counterfactual thinking does not provide a viable foundation for trust. Like hope, trust is susceptible to disappointment because, unlike faith, trust does not operate in counterfactual ways. For instance, failure can invite revoking trust, retreating to more familiar worlds (Stockdale, 2017).

Children’s trusting commitment in the interactions with educators is pivotal for the viability of education. Even the most successful educational journey can start with the shock of displacement from familiar life-worlds where risk is (generally) limited (Giddens, 1991), to enter largely unknown territories (Risquez et al., 2007). Trust is particularly necessary for children who leave familiar life worlds (Taylor and Harris-Evans, 2018) to move into unfamiliar territories (Koranteng et al., 2018). The child’s access to the education system lends itself as an example of *de-territorialisation* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004), which is epitomised by the discursive replacement of the child with the pupil. The effects of de-territorialisation cannot be prevented, because de-territorialisation relates to an ontological shift in the life of children characteristic of modernity. De-territorialisation is not only related to schooling, because it has been observed in contexts of home education (Bhopal and Myers, 2018).

Teaching is thus a social situation where a child, who might ignore the education system both in terms of organisations and pedagogical practices, encounters the system face-to-face. Teaching can reinforce the child’s trust in the system in form of trust in the teacher, but it can also reinforce sceptical attitudes towards education. Giddens defines *access points* the social situations where the individual encounters a system embodied in concrete individuals. At any access point, the trustworthiness of the system is evaluated, based on the interactions with the individuals that embody the system (O’Neill, 2018), suggesting domain-specific ontology of trust (D’Cruz, 2018). The teacher embodies the education system that the child may or may not trust. Domenicucci and Holton (2017) describe the interactive expansions or retreat of trust as a two-place relation. During teaching, the interactions between the child and the teacher can either strengthen trust or awaking suspicions and distrust, because trust levels are influenced by specific interactions that constitute access points.

An exercise in critical discourse analysis suggests that the concept of de-territorialisation is not alien to the pedagogical discourse. Pedagogy understands the goal of education as supporting children’s journey to reach a destination from where it is possible to claim an empowered identity (Fleming et al., 2010). The return of the educated individual in its familiar world, armed with the confidence and the resources to reshape it lends itself as an example of a movement, temporally situated, between *de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation*; Deleuze and Guattari, 2004), when

self-identity and aspirations are aligned with real capabilities (Smith et al., 2025) is the ultimate measure of success of education, which is currently objectified in the public discourse as “impact”.

However, the pedagogical narration of education as the foundation of successful life-trajectories is not sufficient to motivate children’s participation in it. Without children’s trusting commitment, education could not reproduce itself. Lack of trust implies losing opportunities of active participation, and marginalisation implies reduced preparation to take the risk of trusting, activating anxiety and suspicion towards educators’ actions (Farini, 2014). Thus, an important theme concerns possible foundations of children’s trusting commitment in education.

### **A taxonomy of trust in education: Trust based on expertise**

Expertise, teachers’ expertise as well as organisational expertise, may be the foundation of trusting commitment in education. Trust in expertise underpins the semantics of the revival of teacher-centred methodologies that explicitly postulate that children’s trusting commitment depend on trust in adults’ expert guidance, counselling and teaching (Kitchen, 2014). Nevertheless, already with regard to classic pedagogy, teacher-centred approaches have been questioned for failing to acknowledge the autonomy of the child as a sense-making consciousness that can reject education not only in relation to its contents, but also considering its underpinning intentions (Baraldi, 2023).

In the social dimension, trust in expertise concerns the participation in educational interactions (the most obvious example would be teaching) of the *pupil*. Expertise is the premise for role-centred communication between the teacher-as-expert and the pupil and offers fragile foundations for communication centred on expectations of personal expression, that is, communication centred on the child (Giddens, 1991; Luhmann, 1988).

In educational interactions, trust in expertise does not concern the adult-child interpersonal trusting relationship, because expertise refers to role performances and standardised expectations, not expectations of personal contributions (Baraldi, 2014). Observed from a sociological perspective, trust in expertise presupposes the hierarchical positioning of participants, based on unequal epistemic authority with the children having limited and conditional access to the role of authors of valid knowledge (Heritage and Raymond, 2005). Hierarchical positioning based on unequal epistemic authority produces differential opportunities for active participation (Baraldi, 2023; Farini and Scollan, 2023), which has been conceptualised as reduced agency in educational interactions (Oswell, 2013). The reduced opportunities for active participation available to the *pupil*, which are intrinsic to unequal epistemic rights may affect the *child’s* inclination towards trusting commitments, therefore reducing opportunities to *learn trust* by taking the risk of engaging in social interactions that are not structured by standardised expectations of educational performances (Baraldi, 2014). Trust in expertise may support pupils’ trust in the teachers and pupils’ trust in education; nevertheless, it cannot support trust commitments outside a hierarchical positioning based on unequal epistemic authority. Trust in expertise presupposes the child’s acceptance of hierarchical positioning; for this reason, it encounters the same structural limits of educational communication. The pupil is a social representation within hierarchical positioning based on unequal epistemic authority. On the contrary, the child is positioned outside the hierarchical positioning based on unequal epistemic authority, that is, outside the social foundations of trust in expertise.

### **A taxonomy of trust in education: Trust based on categorical inequalities**

Not included in the taxonomy of trust presented by Giddens (1990, 1991), therefore making its discussion an innovative contribution of this article to scholarly debate, is another type of trust in

education: *trust based on categorical inequalities*. The theoretical underpinning of trust based on categorical inequalities is Tilly's idea that the repetition of communication that generates inequalities over time, embeds inequality in the system, making hierarchical positioning a structure of communication (Tilly, 1998). Tilly's idea is particularly poignant for education, where inequality among individual performances is generated by continuing operations of assessment. Inequalities among individual performances and individual levels of attainment become both an expected output of the system, and a structure orientating communication in the system.

Categorical inequalities can be created through a specialised form of communication, assessment, that produces performance-based categorisations of pupils. Categorical distinctions, and the position of each individual within a category, can support the decision concerning who should be trusted and who should not. As Tilly puts it, temporalised organisational operations such as educational assessment may lead to de-temporalised categorical inequalities. Pupils are categorised according to their performances, and categorical distinctions become stable features of the schools-as-organisations, structuring patterns of expectations. Categorical distinctions can be conceptualised as discursive constructions that determine expectations (Luhmann, 1995) and the positioning (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999) of pupils within interactions in schools. Because categorical distinctions can be used as a reference for a differentiated allocation of trust commitments in the teaching relationship, they can enhance the stability of educational communication. Categorical inequalities reduce risks, supporting the decision-maker in the choice whether to accord trust or not. This is an argument for the effects of categorical inequality on the stability of relationships: the former stabilises the latter (Tilly, 1998). It is essential to highlight that Tilly's argumentation should not be seen as aiming to a homeostatic version of functionalism, where social relations organically fit together in fully integrated systems. Whilst Tilly's argumentation is ultimately functionalist, nevertheless it allows for struggles and contradictions, and it appears to be readily applicable to schools, where categorical inequalities generated by educational selection (assessment) orientate differential allocation of trust. This is true even outside of interactions specialised in selection such as assessments, for instance at the micro-interactive level of unequal distribution of praises or reprimands.

Categorically-based inequalities also stabilise positions of marginalisation for some pupils. Notwithstanding comforting but perhaps ideological slogans such as education to deliver "excellence for all", rejection is the other side of selection, and it is necessary for selection to be meaningful. Categorical inequalities present schools, as any other educational organisation, with a paradox: the stabilisation of social relationships may hinder the capability of educational organisations to accomplish the function claimed for itself by the education system: the socialisation of *all* children.

Trust based on categorical inequality relies on the assessment of pupils' role performances, not on the acceptance of children's personal contributions. Like trust based on expertise, trust based on categorical inequality is made viable by the hierarchical positioning between teachers, with superior epistemic authority, and pupils. Hierarchical positioning is essential to legitimise selective assessment that produces categorised inequalities.

Pupils, the persona ficta replacing children as the reference of educational communication, are not recognised as legitimate authors of valid knowledge (Farini and Scollan, 2023). As for trust in expertise, the presupposition of trust based on categorical inequalities is that trust is founded on the assessment of pupils' performances oriented by standardised expectations (Baraldi, 2023).

Nevertheless, while categorisations and inequalities are intrinsic to the positioning of pupils, they are simultaneously observed by children. Children are not created by education and have the possibility of refusing educational contents, intentions and outcomes, for instance the construction of categorical inequalities. Teachers' trust based on categorical inequalities is one side of the coin, with children dis-trust provoked by categorical inequalities etched on the other side of it.

## Speaking to the pupil, unable to hear the child: The limits of trust based on hierarchical order

Trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities co-evolve in educational interactions: one as the presupposition of the other: teachers' expertise legitimises the assessment of pupils' performances; the assessment of performances generates categorical inequalities; categorical inequalities influence educational performances, and the observation of them.

Trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities develop from contexts structured by hierarchical communication centred on role performances. The persons of children (as much as the persons of teachers) are positioned outside of educational communication. Persons may enter educational communication, but only as themes of communication, not agents. Educational communication may observe the persons of children or the persons of teachers as resources, or dangers, for role performances.

Trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities are both unidirectional, although the direction changes. Trust based on expertise supports pupils' on of trust participation in educational interactions. The direction of trust commitment is unidirectional, from the pupils to the teachers. Trust based on categorical inequalities supports teachers' decision-making, both in the micro-context of interactions and in the organisational dimension of education. Again, the direction of trust commitment is unidirectional, this time from the teachers to the pupils.

The dynamic co-evolution of trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities may support pupils' participation in educational interactions, as well as reducing the complexity intrinsic to the assessment and consequent categorisation of pupils. Trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities operate within communication processes that are structured by expectations of role performances, whether such expectations concern teacher's display of expertise, pupils' display of learning, or both.

Expertise and categorical inequalities are based on, and reproduce, hierarchical *role* relationships; they are consubstantial to the socio-cultural process of pupilisation of the child. However, this taxonomy of trust in education was provoked by a question concerning *children's* trust in education, a question concerning the participation of children as persons in educational interactions. The double dilemma raised by the original question remains, because types of trust based on hierarchical role relationship can only elude it. Can education operate if communication is structured by expectations of personal expression, and hierarchy is replaced by equal epistemic rights? Is interpersonal trust building between adults and children in education, that is, a social system evolved around hierarchical positioning viable?

## A changing socio-cultural context for trust dynamics in generational relationships

Returning to Giddens, and Tilly, theories of trust commitments, trust-building is not necessarily dependent on expertise, and it is not dependent on categorical inequalities. Trust can be built through interpersonal affective relationships that mobilise trust through a process of mutual disclosure. This introduces a third possible source of trust in education. It is a type of trust that radically differs from trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities, because trusting commitments are motivated by the relationship between persons and expectations of personal expressions (Giddens, 1991), rather than the observation of role performances.

The viability of interpersonal trust in education relies on the ongoing transformation of the *generationing* practices of "doing generation" that structure a *generational order* (Alanen, 2009, 2019). This has led research to question the viability of interpersonal trust building between adults

and children in educational contexts, which are structured by hierarchical positioning and expectations of role performances (Warming, 2013), with authors associating the viability of interpersonal trust to the recognition of children's citizenship in the education system (Baraldi, 2023; Percy-Smith, 2010; Riddell et al., 2021). Children's citizenship in the education system presupposes the recognition of children's self-determination rights, and their empowerment as contributors of valid knowledge (Invernizzi and Williams, 2008; Kjørholt and Qvortrup, 2012). A poignant example of the shift in the positioning of children and adults in the contemporary generationing discourse is offered by a quote from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005)

*Children actively make sense of the physical, social and cultural dimensions of the world they inhabit, learning progressively from their activities and their interactions with others, children as well as adults*

*learning progressively from activities and interactions with others* entails the recognition of children's role as authors of their own learning and knowledge. Learning from interactions suggests the idea that development is not the outcome of children's internalisation of knowledge transmitted by adults; rather, development is a process whereby children *actively make sense of the physical, social and cultural dimensions of the world that they inhabit*.

## **A key to solve the puzzle: The co-evolution of children's rights of self-determination and personal trust in education**

Coeval to the transformation of the generationing discourse, research on pedagogical innovation has explored the viability of trust based on personal relationships in education, evidencing children's self-determination as one of its social conditions (Farini and Scollan, 2023; Harris and Kaur, 2012). The autonomy of children's construction of the meanings of their experiences; an interactive and relational ontology of development, children's self-determination rights: the conditions of trust-building based on interpersonal relationships in education coincide the conditions for children's agency in education (Baraldi, 2023; McDowall-Clark, 2020; Mikuska et al., 2024; Murray, 2019).

The ontology of trust building based on interpersonal relationships in education is not confined to theoretical reasoning or experimentations of pedagogical innovation; it is a tenet of a pedagogical discourse continuously translated in teaching practices: Early Childhood Education (ECE). Developing from the legacy of pedagogists such as Vygotsky, Froebel, Montessori, Rousseau and Pestalozzi (Reed and Walker, 2015), the hierarchical positioning of teachers and pupils based on unequal epistemic rights is criticised by several works in the area of ECE advocating the value that children's individual life experiences and knowledge bring into the classroom environment (Cameron and Moss, 2020; Farini and Scollan, 2023; Tisdall, 2015).

Whilst incompatible with hierarchy-based types of trust because it replaces unequal epistemic rights with equality, the positioning of children as legitimate authors of valid knowledge is conducive to personal trust. It is possible to conceptualise a co-evolution between equality in epistemic rights and personal trust. Children's position as authors of valid knowledge in social interactions invites to conceptualise trust as relational (Domenicucci and Holton, 2017) and dynamic (Warming, 2013), in line with Domenicucci and Holton (2017) connotation of trust as a two-place relation.

Children's status as author of valid knowledge promotes personal trust: (1) orientating communication towards expectations of personal contributions; (2) facilitating equality in active participation; (3) acknowledging self-determination and autonomy in children's choices. Personal trust is the condition for the recognition of children as authors of valid knowledge, because it values mutual disclosure and affectivity, rather than role-related performances.

## Taking it all back. What can make education “for all”: The pursuing of inclusivity in the movement from the pupil to the child

Transformations of generational order has allowed educationalists from a wide range of disciplines such as pedagogy, psychology, sociology and philosophy to challenge the hierarchical, top-down, models of transmission of knowledge underpinning the historical development of the education system. Positioning children as authors of valid knowledge in the education system entails important consequences for the reproduction of the system itself, because it allows trust-building processes that are mutual, relational and based on the promotion of active citizenship in education (Farini and Scollan, 2019; Seele, 2012), reducing the risk of alienation intrinsic to trust based on expertise and trust based categorical inequalities. Promoting children’s self-determination can be a way to build personal trust through interactions structured by expectations of personal contributions at access points where children meet teachers as embodiment of the education system (Farini, 2014).

Ultimately, the challenge for an education system that aims to maximise inclusivity, coherently with the traditional motto “education for all children”, is to establish the conditions for trust that develops from interpersonal relationships centred around expectations of personal expression.

Bringing Buber’s theory of dialogic communication (Buber, 2004) to the fore, personal trust can be approached as foundation for mutual humanisation, because the person and the expectations of personal expression, rather than the role and the expectations of standardised performances, become reference and structures of communication. Buber’s mutual humanisation, as much as the development of interpersonal trust, are based on the acknowledgment of all participants’ status as authors of valid knowledge. Using Buber’s powerful language, the challenge for education concerns the transformation of educational relationships from an “*I to It*” model, where the *It*, the pupil, is the “other” projected by educational expectations and planning, to an “*I to Thou*” model, based on the acknowledgement of the incommensurable alterity of the “other”, of the *Thou*, the child (Buber, 2004).

Early Childhood Education has been introduced as exemplary of the viability of this cultural transformation, because it advocates self-determination in education for young children, who are traditionally denied the access to the status of authors of knowledge. The transformation *in, for* and *from* the education system, if an inclusive type of trust for an inclusive education is to be pursued, concerns the replacement, starting from the micro-level of interactions, of the persona ficta of pupil with the person of the child as the social reference for communication processes that do not fear but celebrate children’s self-determination, and see children’s personal expression as a valuable resource for education.

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank their institutions for the support provided to allow the preparation of the article.

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### Ethical considerations

This conceptual article does not contain any studies with human or animal participants.

## Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Data availability statement

This conceptual article does not discuss data produced for its purpose.

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## Author biographies

**Federico Farini** is Professor in Sociology at the University of Northampton where he leads the Centre for Psychological and Sociological Sciences. Between 2015 and 2017 he led the University of Suffolk equality and inclusion strategy. In 2015, he was a founding member of the Centre for Educational Research and Scholarship at Middlesex University. Federico received a PhD in Sociology of Intercultural Relations from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. His research activity and publications concern conflict management, dialogic education, facilitation of children’s agency, intercultural communication, interpreting in healthcare and education, dialogic integration of migrant children and asylum seekers in schools, and the renovation of urban spaces. Federico’s current interests mainly revolve around issues of inequality in the access to education and social services, as well as around participatory research methods and public sociology.

**Angela Scollan** is Associate Professor in Early Childhood Studies and Education Studies at Middlesex University, where she obtained her Ph.D. with a research on facilitation of children’s agency as a pedagogical method to promote children’s self-determination in the classroom. Since the early 1990s, Angela has worked directly with and for children positioning her practice within a transdisciplinary approach and as a rights-based advocate. Her research and writing focus on themes relevant to education and care: adults-children interactions; dialogic pedagogies, leadership and management, curriculum studies for Early Years Education, critical education studies, social work with young children, services-families’ partnership. As an activist against educational disadvantage, Angela has worked with many local authorities in projects to support inclusion and equality in education across England towards enhanced social mobility.